

Belnemus
Powhatan vicinity
Powhatan County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-86

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office
for Southeast Unit

HABS

VA

73 Pow.V

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BELNEMUS

Powhatan, Powhatan County, Virginia

Owner: Mann Valentine

Date of erection: c. 1760

Architect: Unknown; elevation probably derived from plate No. III,
Robert Morris' Select Architecture

Present condition: Good

Description:

Frame; central block two stories, hipped roof, chimneys at either side; wings one story, gable roof parallel to front; rear wing two stories, modern. Front main block three bays, center door (two-valve), wings one bay. Weatherboards beaded, cornices modillioned; apex of main roof covered by pyramidal projection. Present roof-covering tin; original--shingle, round butt. Lower sash modern; upper six over six lights.

Plan: central salon occupying whole depth of main building with doors and flanking windows at front and rear. Chimneys project into room and are off center toward front. Doors to wings in deep chimney recess toward front, but space from chimney to rear wall partitioned off for stairs. There was formerly a flight on each side, entered from the wings, but both are now disused. The old soffit of the stair can be seen in the ceiling of the salon, and in the side walls are the original small windows that lighted them. There is one room in each wing.

The woodwork is interesting throughout. The salon has the double front and rear doors framed by an architrave and crowned by a Doric frieze with triglyphs and a low pediment with dentil bands. The chimney projection is trimmed with freely rendered Doric pilasters on pedestals, supporting similar friezes and pediments. The east chimney is used for a fireplace, but while the west is an architectural recall it is in the form of a bookcase with its trim to correspond. The fireplace has a moulded surround, high above which is a mantle shelf supported on two tall fluted, reeded and carved bracket strips. Above is a dog-eared panel surrounded by guilloche. The effect of the woodwork is rich and interesting, but on analysis its parts are countrified, and the arrangement unacademic. This room has a high sheathed dado. The wing rooms have mantles of a later period, dating from c. 1800. They have diminutive pilasters, narrow

architraves, wide friezes, and cornice shelves. A similar mantle in the modern dining room came from another building nearby. This has the members carved, as well as carved reliefs in the pilaster blocks and the key block. In the former are vases with foliage, and in the latter a shield borne by an eagle holding olive leaves and arrows.

Under the salon is an old kitchen with a large fireplace and oven. In the yard is another kitchen as well as smoke house and other outbuildings.

Additional Data:

The house was built by the Mayo family, and from them went successively to the Clark, Finch, and Valentine families.

Leaves T. Waterman

11/2/40

VA
73 Pow.V

BELNEMUS

Powhatan vicinity, Powhatan County, Virginia

Owner: Mr. Mann ValentineDate of erection: c. 1800Description: (From letter to owner from Mr. Waterman, June 24, 1940)

The house is interesting as being one of a group, the source of the design of which was Robert Morris' Select Architecture published in London in 1755. Plate No. 3 seemed to be the inspiration for Belnemus, Battersea, and Brandon. It may be the three were by the same architect, but if so it would seem he did not supervise the construction of Belnemus. The design indicates a scholarly origin, but the detail has a rural aspect that is foreign to the two other houses. Thomas Jefferson has been credited with the design of Brandon, though this connection has not been authenticated. In Mr. Kimball's book, Jefferson, the Architect, two plans are shown from his papers that are reminiscent of the plan of Belnemus. Neither has the double fronted salon, as at Belnemus, with the twin stairs. These plans and the houses mentioned, as well as The Rowe, in Charles City County, and the Sample house in Williamsburg show the Morris derivation with the departures seen in the Jefferson plans.

The interior woodwork is very unusual as far as the salon goes and has every evidence of being original. It was probably designed with the help of English architectural style books but the effect is thoroughly colonial, on account of the departures from academic correctness. The balancing mantel and bookcase motifs are unique in our knowledge. The use of angle modillions in the cornices is characteristic in pre-Revolutionary Virginia houses and is often found after that time. The mantels in the three other rooms are good examples of the period of about 1800. The dining room mantel with the carved sage panel is unusual but not unique.

The location of the kitchen in the cellar is probably older than its location in the yard. In smaller, very early houses the kitchen was also the general first-floor living room as in the Brineon house in Princess Anne County. Probably about 1700 kitchen came commonly to be built in the yard, but sometimes winter kitchens were built in the basement of the house as well. The alignment of the various domestic buildings to form a composition, as at Belnemus, dates in England before 1650, when Inigo Jones built Stoke Bruerne in Northamptonshire. The Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, commenced in 1705, is probably the first example in Virginia.

--Thomas T. Waterman